



COUNCIL MINUTES

March 5, 2009

The City Council of the City of Mesa met in a Study Session in the lower level meeting room of the Council Chambers, 57 East 1st Street, on March 5, 2009 at 7:32 a.m.

COUNCIL PRESENT

Mayor Scott Smith
Alex Finter
Dina Higgins
Kyle Jones
Dennis Kavanaugh
Dave Richins
Scott Somers

COUNCIL ABSENT

None

OFFICERS PRESENT

Christopher Brady
Debbie Spinner
Linda Crocker

1. Hear a presentation by the Downtown Mesa Association and provide feedback on a preliminary downtown vision and proposed stakeholder outreach process.

Crystal Russell, Chairman of the Downtown Mesa Association (DMA) Board, and Tom Verploegen, President of the DMA, addressed the Council relative to this agenda item. Ms. Russell stated that prior to beginning her presentation, she wanted to thank Vice Mayor Jones for serving as the City Council's liaison to the DMA Board.

Ms. Russell offered a brief overview of the 34-member DMA Board and explained that it is comprised of a broad cross section of downtown property owners and merchants. She stated that the Board recently participated in a number of significant projects, including developing a "brand" for the DMA and also creating "a preliminary vision" for the downtown area in the future. Ms. Russell noted that subsequent to DMA representatives meeting with Mayor Smith and Vice Mayor Jones to discuss the preliminary vision, the DMA Board drafted an updated "Downtown Mesa Vision and Concept Plan." She said that the Mayor issued a challenge to the DMA to facilitate a more collaborative and broader community planning/input process with regard to the development of the Plan.

Mr. Verploegen displayed a PowerPoint presentation (A copy is available for review in the City Clerk's Office) and reported that the DMA, which is a private, non-profit organization, is dedicated to the beneficial economic growth and business development of downtown Mesa. He noted that the organization, which was incorporated in 1984, was Arizona's first downtown improvement district. Mr. Verploegen said that the DMA serves 450 businesses and 250 commercial property owners in the downtown area and provides a variety of services including,

but not limited to, dining guides, press releases, web sites, street banners, sidewalk kiosks, direct mail services, and event facilitation.

In response to a series of questions from Mayor Smith, Mr. Verploegen clarified that the DMA serves as “a secondary support system” to the local merchants who organize events in the downtown area.

Mayor Smith commented that it would seem as though one of the functions of the DMA would be to create an atmosphere that would bring people to the downtown area. He stated that if the DMA is merely facilitating events and leaving the details up to the merchants, “something is missing.”

Ms. Russell responded that the DMA has been the driving force in a number of special events in the downtown area (i.e., Merry Main Street, Sculptures in the Streets) and explained that many such events were sponsor-driven. She noted, however, that due to current economic conditions, sponsorship has been severely impacted. Ms. Russell added that recently when the local merchants have sponsored an event, the DMA has assisted the businesses, for instance, in obtaining insurance, City permits and publicizing the event.

Mayor Smith further remarked that Mesa is “missing out on a lot of opportunities” to bring individuals to the downtown area. He cited, as an example, citizens who attend the Chicago Cubs spring training games at Hohokam Park and are unaware of the fact that downtown Mesa is a short distance from the stadium.

Discussion ensued relative to the fact that although the Board would be supportive of the DMA hiring a Special Event Coordinator who would be responsible for organizing special events in the downtown area, it is not possible due to the DMA’s current budget constraints; that because there is an inconsistency with regard to sponsorship for special events, the DMA would continue to pursue public/private and non-profit collaborative efforts to seek funding for such events; and that State law imposes certain restrictions with regard to the kind of services that a special improvement district can perform and would not allow the DMA to expand its special assessment to include event organization.

Mayor Smith proposed that Ms. Russell and Mr. Verploegen share his above-referenced comments with their fellow Boardmembers. He stated that perhaps the City could share its limited resources through existing personnel to assist the DMA in the coordination of special events.

Mr. Verploegen continued with his presentation and highlighted additional services provided by the DMA to the downtown property owners and merchants. Those services include the following: business development/recruitment; management of 13,000 public parking spaces; event management at the Mesa Arts Center; parking enforcement; cleanliness and maintenance in the downtown area; crime prevention and business security liaison. He also displayed a series of photographs illustrating various commercial developments and renovations that have occurred in downtown Mesa in the last 25 years.

Mr. Verploegen further offered a short synopsis of the various elements of the “Downtown Mesa Vision and Concept Plan” as drafted by the DMA. (See Attachment 1) He explained that the five vision elements include the following:

- Flourishing downtown, which would attract jobs, residents, growth and investments.
- Pedestrian friendly, with a focus on walkability.

In response to a question from Mayor Smith, Mr. Verploegen explained that per the information the DMA has received from Valley METRO, he anticipates that Main Street would be the preferred site for the light rail transit (LRT) alignment.

Mr. Verploegen continued with his presentation of the Plan’s vision elements as follows:

- Diverse downtown with mixed uses, culturally and generationally inclusive.
- Unique downtown, which will develop distinctive offerings.
- Collaborative downtown, building a downtown business culture and sense of community.

Mr. Verploegen also spoke regarding ten transformative projects/programs that have been proposed by the DMA Board. They include the following: Embrace regional/area transportation access; Adopt a City of Mesa Municipal Buildings Master Plan in the downtown area; Develop City-owned redevelopment vacant property within downtown; Formulate tailored downtown Mesa Building Rehabilitation Code; Subdivide outmoded and oversized private buildings in the downtown core.

Mayor Smith suggested that the DMA Board, many of whom are property owners in the downtown area, work with City staff to identify those items within the City’s current regulatory framework (i.e., fire and safety, Building Code, zoning) that could be obstacles to a developer interested, for instance, in subdividing an oversized/outmoded building in the downtown core and developing it. He stated that one of the City’s major efforts is to eliminate “the unintended consequences” of regulations and seek viable alternatives so that a developer could achieve the necessary public safety and building safety objectives without having to adopt 2009 standards, which are intended for new buildings, and create issues with existing or older buildings.

Mr. Verploegen continued with his overview of the proposed transformative projects/programs including the following: Develop a unique and inviting walkable public realm; Evaluate a Latino/Hispanic marketplace; Attract more education facilities; “See and be seen” in an active downtown; and Increase downtown’s sphere of influence.

Additional discussion ensued relative to the “Planning Template” for the development of the “Downtown Mesa Vision and Concept Plan;” that the DMA would facilitate the inclusion of community outreach and public input in the visioning process; and the proposed timeline with regard to the completion of the Plan, its presentation to the City Council, and its adoption and implementation.

Mayor Smith stated that as part of the visioning process, it is important that the City and the DMA establish “a plan of action” with regard to identifying an entity that would “take the lead” in planning special events in the downtown area. He added that funding options for such services should also be addressed at that time.

Councilmember Finter commented that he would not support the expansion of the improvement district beyond the original borders of the Town Center area. He stated that he would hope there would be another option by which to “increase the downtown’s sphere of influence” without proceeding in that direction.

In response to a series of comments by Councilmember Richins, Mr. Verploegen clarified that the DMA is seeking input from the entire community with regard to the draft “Downtown Mesa Vision and Concept Plan” and not just the downtown stakeholders.

Further discussion ensued relative to the fact that the long-term goals for the downtown area include a centralized City campus; that the proposed annual assessments for the Town Center Improvement District are approximately \$275,000; that the public space management assessment is estimated at \$235,000; and that the annual assessments are based on the benefits derived by the downtown property owners and not the value of their individual properties.

Vice Mayor Jones stated that it has been a privilege to serve on the DMA Board for the past six and a half years. He noted that the Board has worked very hard to improve the downtown area and said he is confident that such efforts would continue in the future.

Mayor Smith expressed appreciation to the DMA Board for their efforts and hard work with regard to the drafting of the “Downtown Mesa Vision and Concept Plan.” He commented that the Council has focused on the downtown as a point of emphasis because a vibrant downtown reflects the “health” of a community. Mayor Smith also noted that the City is the largest landowner in the Town Center area and has a vested interest in ensuring its growth and expansion. He stated that the City would be actively involved in the visioning process and added that today’s presentation has raised questions in his mind regarding the City’s role as it relates to funding special events in the downtown area.

2. Hear reports on meetings and/or conferences attended.

Councilmember Richins announced the birth of his daughter, Camille Marie Richins, who was born on March 2, 2009.

Councilmember Richins: Arizona Transit Association Rail Conference; “Top 2 Bottom” event.

3. Scheduling of meetings and general information.

City Manager Christopher Brady stated that the meeting schedule is as follows:

Thursday, March 5, 2009, 6:30 p.m. – District 6 “Building Strong Neighborhoods” Meeting

Monday, March 9, 2009, 8:00 a.m. – Prayer Breakfast hosted by Councilmember Higgins at the Mesa Arts Center

Thursday, March 12, 2009, 7:30 a.m. – Study Session

4. Items from citizens present.

Gary Stevers, a Mesa resident, and a representative of the Mesa Hohokam and Ferguson Jenkins Foundations, invited everyone to attend a celebrity baseball game that will be held on March 25, 2009 at Hohokam Stadium. He stated that a number of Major League players are scheduled to participate in the game, including Hall of Fame pitcher Ferguson Jenkins.

It was moved by Councilmember Somers, seconded by Vice Mayor Jones, that the Council convene an Executive Session at 9:01 a.m.

5. Convene an Executive Session.

- a. Discussion or consideration of employment, assignment, appointment, promotion, demotion, salaries, discipline, dismissal, or resignation of a public officer, appointee or employee of the City. (A.R.S. §38-431.03A(1))
 1. City Manager review
- b. Discussion or consultation with the City Attorney in order to consider the City's position and instruct the City Attorney regarding the City's position regarding contracts that are the subject of negotiations, in pending or contemplated litigation or in settlement discussions conducted in order to avoid or resolve litigation. (A.R.S. §38-431.03A(4))
 1. Arizona Diamondbacks Spring Training
 2. Arizona Water Company

6. Adjournment.

Without objection, the Study Session adjourned at 10:30 a.m. at the conclusion of the Executive Session.

SCOTT SMITH, MAYOR

ATTEST:

LINDA CROCKER, CITY CLERK

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Study Session of the City Council of Mesa, Arizona, held on the 5th day of March, 2009. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

LINDA CROCKER, CITY CLERK